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ABSTRACT

The nature and extent of code-mixing in the language acquisition process over a 12-month period was studied with a child growing up in a bilingual English-Chichewa (Bantu language) speaking home. Data are examined from age 18 1/2 months to 30 1/2 months. Definitions of code-switching are offered, and an analysis of code-mixing in the speech of the author's daughter is presented. Utterances were abstracted that contained: (1) loan words and loan blends that are in common usage in Chichewa speakers; (2) the family's loan words for which Chichewa has no equivalent; (3) genuine mixing, where both languages had different words, but the child either did not know the word in the language she was speaking, or did not use it for that particular utterance; (4) morphological borrowing; and (5) examples where the child seemed to be aware of mixing, and switched to the language in which she could say the whole sentence. The paper includes speech samples, data on percentages of types of mixing, data on percentages of syntactic utterances mixed, and a list of utterances that were mixed at the level of the phrase. (SW)

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# A Study of Code-Mixing in Bilingual Language Acquisition

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In this paper I describe one aspect of the simultaneous language acquisition of a young child growing up in a bilingual English-Chichewa speaking home (Chichewa is a Bantu language spoken in Malawi and other parts of East Central Africa). In other papers (Chimombo 1977, 1978), I have discussed the nature of the development of semantic-syntactic relations in bilingual language acquisition, and the effect interaction of the two languages had on the order of acquisition of English grammatical morphemes. This study now turns to an examination of the nature and extent of code-switching in the language acquisition process of a bilingual child over a twelve-month period.

There is a growing body of literature on the interaction of the two languages in a bilingual child: Leopold (1949); Swain (1971, 1972, 1975); Wentz and McClure (1975); Pfaff (1975); Fantini (1974), among others, have all pointed to the absence of random behavior in this interaction. The majority of studies have, however, been of children bilingual in two related languages: French-English, Spanish-English, for the most part. In this case, the two languages being acquired are totally unrelated, with very different morphology and syntax, in addition to the phonological differences. Had Burling (1958) elaborated more on the interaction of the two languages, Garo and English, in the language acquisition of his child, some interesting comparisons might have emerged.

Before I continue, I will examine some definitions of code-switching. Di Pietro (1978:275) states

> Code-switching is the use of more than one language by communicants in the execution of a speech act. There is no claim to comprehensiveness in this definition.

Haugen (in Shaffer, 1978:265) considers switching to constitute "the alternate use of distinct codes" or "the stringing together of 'unadapted' words and phrases." Wentz and McClure (1975:7) provide the following discussion:

> We view the production of bilingual utterances as a surface manifestation of two distinct phenomena: code-mixing and code-changing. Taken together, these two phenomena constitute what is generally termed code-switching.
>
> ... Code-mixing is characterized at times by conflicts between the grammatical systems involved; these conflicts are resolved generally by syntactic principles which take both systems into account in various ways.

It is code-mixing that I wish to concentrate on in this study.

The subject of this study is my daughter, Tina. She is now four years old, but I examine here only the data from the time she was 18 1/2 months old, the time of the emergence of syntax, to the time she was 30 1/2 months old. In the monolingual society of New York (there are no other native speakers of Chichewa that we know of), her Chichewa has become dormant, but the twelve-month period I examine is a time when she was a relatively balanced bilingual, if such can be said at that age. Table I provides a summary description of the data, times, places, and people involved with Tina. Tina was born in Malawi and we lived there until she was 22 1/2 months old. Naturally enough, Chichewa was dominant at that time, but

her English was also developing. My husband and I decided from the beginning that we should both speak both languages to her, my husband being a native speaker of Chichewa and I being a native speaker of English, but both of us being bilingual. Her nanny spoke almost exclusively in Chichewa to her, although she knew English (following our request). Her paternal grandmother speaks Chichewa only (and Yao, another language of Malawi). Tina had a few friends who spoke English, but the majority of her time was spent with her nanny and parents.

Then, from the age of 22 1/2 months to 27 months, Tina was in England. For the first month, my husband was with us, but from September to December 1976, Tina had no contact with a native Chichewa-speaker, only myself. Nonetheless, her Chichewa continued to progress, as shown by the increase in mean length of utterance, but her English rapidly gained ground too. I spoke to her almost exclusively in Chichewa, knowing that I was the only model she had, while my parents, who do not speak Chichewa, spoke only English to her. At first, she would respond with silence to them, and would practice her English on me or her toys, dolls, and teddy bear. But she never mixed Chichewa in English sentences, except for the one word my parents adopted: anganga, when speaking to them. (Anganga is the Chichewa word for grandparents, grandmother, or grandfather.)

In December, 1976, we joined my husband in New York, where we have been since. Here it was that Tina for the first time

came into contact with a large number of children her own age. The pull of peer influence was noticeable within a month of our arrival in the United States, not yet reflected in her mlu in Chichewa, but in the marked preference for English over Chichewa. By the age of 30 1/2 months, Tina was forgetting Chichewa and having trouble with remembering vocabulary (not yet the functor words, however). We continue to use Chichewa at home, but we too suffer the pull of the community, and use English more frequently.

We first recorded Tina when she was 18 1/2 months old and from that time we have kept a diary too, which was extensive until she was three years old. In addition, we have continued to tape-record her. The tapes have been transcribed according to the conventions established by Bloom (1973).

For the purposes of this study, I abstracted all the utterances containing (a) loan words and loan blends which are in common usage in Chichewa-speakers; (b) Tina's and our loan words for which Chichewa has no equivalent (those which were the result of being in a different society); (c) genuine mixing, where both languages had different words, but Tina either did not know the word in the language she was speaking, or did not use it for that particular utterance; (d) morphological borrowing; and (e) examples where Tina seemed to be aware of mixing and switched to the language in which she could say the whole sentence. Since I am examining code-mixing only, by utterance, I mean any utterance which can be considered syntactic, i.e. more than one morpheme. We recorded a total of

4870 syntactic utterances, of which 741 were mixed in the sense given in the above description (a)-(e). However, of these 741 utterances only 33 consisted of mixing at the level of the phrase, the remaining being simply one word, usually a noun. As for the substitution of single words, 433 consisted of loan words or loan blends, which strictly speaking cannot be considered as causing mixing of utterances. I examined them here to see whether the fact that Chichewa has borrowed so heavily from English in the twentieth century had any influence on the pattern of Tina's mixing. I will return to this comment later.

I must explain, first, my use of the terms loan word and loan blend in the analysis of this data. I have used the term loan word to refer to any unchanged English word Tina used in a Chichewa sentence which actually has a loan blend form in Chichewa, but which she did not use, for example:

Jul 76 ndifuna paper (Loan blend - pepala)
I want _____

Nov 76 ukudula bread ya anganga? (Loan blend - buledi)
you are cutting ___ of granny

I have used the term loan blend to refer to any word which Tina used with normal Chichewalized pronunciation. Since every loan blend has to be assigned to a grammatical class (and even loan words) the only distinguishing feature is the presence or absence of Chichewalized pronunciation in Tina's speech. In most cases, the singular form is unmarked, and it is only in the plural form that one can tell whether it is strictly speaking a loan blend in the sense given by Fraser (1975). Some examples from Tina's

speech are:

Jun 76 ndapeza bukhu (plural - mabuku)
I have found the book

Jul 76 chidoli alila manachu (plural - zidoli)
the dolly is crying for granny
(in this case Tina has also included Yao, the word for granny, as a result of influence from her paternal grandmother)

III Teddy afuna kukhala kubvala dilesi (plural - madilesi)
Teddy wants to sit to put on the dress
(she should have used a clause: to sit that she put on the dress)

Dec 76 Christopher wabvula sokosi, daddy (plural - sokosi)
Christopher has taken off the sock, daddy
(this belongs to the class which has zero morpheme for both singular and plural, but singularity or plurality is marked on the verb or adjective where applicable)

I have used the term borrowed word to described loan words which are not in use in Malawi but have come into Tina's Chichewa due to contact with England and the United States, for example:

II tikakwele roundabout
we should go and climb on _____

Dec 76 poncho waTina ngati yaChristopher
_____ of Tina is like of Christopher
(i.e., Tina's poncho is like Christopher's)

Jan 76 ndifuna kupita ku drying machine
I want to go to the _____

V ndinapita ku playground kukakwela katungwe
I went to the _____ to climb on the swing

The fact that the borrowing goes only one way, from English into Chichewa, and not from Chichewa into English probably has something to do with the fact that, in England and the United States, Tina's experiences have been so completely different that she has not needed to use Chichewa words in English, but

has completely mastered English. In addition, English does not need to borrow from Chichewa in this society, although we may find, when we return to Malawi, that initially Tina will show signs of mixing Chichewa into English sentences. That remains to be seen. But perhaps the most important point is that she only speaks Chichewa to people who know both Chichewa and English, while she speaks English to people she knows do not speak Chichewa. I have already mentioned this fact with respect to her maternal grandparents, but there are other recorded instances: one at Time III, when a friend of mine visited us and the last ten minutes of the tape include her conversation with Tina, in which Tina spoke only English with her, and even with me except for two mixed utterances; the second at all times since we have been in the United States, when she plays with monolingual English-speaking friends.

Table 2 shows the degrees of mixing when the presence of loan blends, loan words, and borrowed words is excluded from the analysis. For the purposes of this analysis, I have also, in Column 5, counted up the number of sentences in which the only borrowed word was daddy. This was, of course, a high frequency word, and since it was a family term (we never used the Chichewa dada or baba), it cannot really be considered to represent mixing in Tina's speech. There is one other word (already mentioned on p. 3) which has become a family word, Chichewa used in English sentences, anganga. In English sentences, Tina only used this word to refer to her maternal grandparents, or her paternal grandmother, never to anybody

Percentages of syntactic utterances mixed

| | 1. All mixed utterances | 2. Mixed, excluding loan blends | 3. Mixed, excluding loan blends and loan words | 4. Mixed, excluding loan blends, loan words, and borrowed words | 5. Mixed, excluding loan blends, loan words, borrowed words, and "daddy" |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | 6.67 | 6.67 | 5.33 | 5.33 | 2.67 |
| Diary Apr-Jul | 15.87 | 11.26 | 8.87 | 8.53 | 5.97 |
| II | 39.50 | 17.36 | 12.57 | 11.38 | 7.19 |
| Diary Sep-Nov | 20.00 | 11.35 | 10.81 | 8.11 | 5.41 |
| III | 26.00 | 19.57 | 8.31 | 7.77 | 6.70 |
| Diary Dec-Jan | 19.09 | 11.60 | 9.91 | 8.27 | 4.72 |
| IV | 7.95 | 3.98 | 3.98 | 3.45 | 2.65 |
| Diary Feb-Mar | 8.20 | 5.41 | 4.74 | 3.81 | 2.79 |
| V | 6.23 | 3.99 | 2.99 | 1.75 | 1.50 |
| Average | 15.21 | 9.57 | 7.43 | 6.32 | 4.21 |

Table 2

Comparison of the degrees of mixing when loan blends, loan words, borrowed words, and the most common family word are excluded

else's grandparents, for whom she used the terms granny and grandpa. There are two words which I excluded completely from the count: Teddy and Dolly. These two words were ones Tina used as names, never with articles in English, and if asked, "What's her name?" she would always answer, "Dolly" or "Teddy." I did not exclude, however, the few sentences where Tina was not referring to her specific doll, the one she called Dolly, but either to a friend's doll, or to her brother's rag doll, but in these cases she used the Chichewa loan blend chidoli in Chichewa sentences.

To return to the question of the pattern of loan words in Chichewa, and the possible effect that may have on the pattern of mixing in Tina's speech, loan words and blends are overwhelmingly nouns in Chichewa, with a few adjectives, numbers, words for colors, an occasional verb, and some formulas, such as please, bye-bye. Table 3a shows the percentages of types of mixing for all mixing, including loan words and blends. As can be seen, mixing is overwhelmingly at the level of the noun alone, not even at the level of the noun phrase. This would seem to indicate that Tina abstracted some information about the nature of borrowing in Chichewa, such that she considered borrowing at the level of the noun completely acceptable. This conclusion is borne out by an analysis of the percentages of types of mixing when loan words and blends are excluded (see Table 3b). The fact that loan words and blends are almost exclusively nouns in Chichewa may also explain the small percentage of noun phrases which were completely in English in Chichewa sentences.

Table 3a

Percentages of types of mixing for all mixing

| | |
|---|---|
| Nouns | 88.26 |
| Colors | 2.56 |
| Formulas | 1.75 |
| Adjectives | 1.75 |
| Numbers | .94 |
| Adverbs | .94 |
| Verbs | .81 |
| Noun phrases | .81 |
| Prep. phrases | .67 |
| Time | .54 |
| Auxiliary | .40 |
| Pronouns | .27 |
| Clauses | .27 |

Table 3b

Percentages of types of mixing, excluding loan words and blends

| | |
|---|---|
| Nouns | 90.06 |
| Colors | all loan words |
| Formulas | all loan words |
| Adjectives | 2.21 |
| Numbers | all loan words |
| Adverbs | 1.93 |
| Verbs | .83 |
| Noun phrases | 1.66 |
| Prep. phrases | 1.38 |
| Time | all loan words |
| Auxiliary | .83 |
| Pronouns | .55 |
| Clauses | .55 |

Table 4

Utterances which were mixed at the level of the phrase

[1] bread - unadapted loan word

| | |
|---|---|
| I | ndi a bird<br>it's |
| Jun 76 | good night, mawa<br>tomorrow<br>(i.e. see you tomorrow) |
| Jul 76 | nice flower kununkhira<br>smells good |
| | thawa, go mummy<br>go away |
| II | taya this one zip[1]<br>throw away |
| | ndagona this way<br>I'm sleeping |
| III | akwele in the boat[1] in the water, mummy<br>she should climb |
| | ndifuna Christopher's bread[1], mama<br>I want |
| Dec 76 | osaopen it<br>don't |
| | go to sleep now, mkatimo<br>inside<br>(i.e. under the blankets) |
| | ulembe ya purple[1] chalk[1]<br>you should write of<br>(i.e. you should write with purple chalk) |
| Jan 77 | say please[1], Tina afuna kudya mtedza<br>wants to eat peanuts |
| | ndatenga plastic[1] bag<br>I have taken |
| | ndifuna kulemba when I finish to eat peanuts, please[1]<br>I want to write |
| | mtundu ya purple[1] one<br>color of |
| | ndinyamule Teddy feel cold<br>I should carry<br>(i.e., because is omitted) |
| | wagunda white door<br>she bumped into |

Table 4 cont.

Tina waika xylophone pa number 12
has put on

ndifuna kutenga ya purple one
I want to take of
(i.e., I want to take the purple one)

ndifuna kubvala sleeping suit on Tina
I want to put on

ndifuna kutenga ya red one
I want to take of

no, I'm not wakhuta
"you've had enough"

osasay thank you
don't

ndifuna kumwa mkaka from the bottle waChristopher
I want to drink milk of

Uncle Bernard akudzaona Tina last week
is coming to see
(i.e., wrong tense, came is intended)

Tina wabvala football socks
has put on

IV ndi sun over world
it's

Feb 77 Christopher wabvala football socks
has put on

ndifuna kukwela ngamila this way, daddy
I want to ride camel

ndifuna kubvala sleeping suit on
I want to put on

Mar 77 mafuta pa bottom, and on my leg, and on my knee
oil on

ndinalumpha up jumped
I jumped

One would expect the fact that there are a large number of loan words in Chichewa to also affect the point at which Tina code-mixed in her sentences, since she might be unsure as to which language she should continue in. An examination of the mixing at the level of the phrase (Table 4) reveals that of 33 such utterances, 18 contain loan words, none of which has been adapted to loan blends in these cases. While in other cases of use of unadapted loan words, Tina did not code-mix beyond the single word, in those cases where she used loan blends, this mixing did not lead to such utterances as those in Table 4. Compare, for example, the following utterances, where, on the one hand, a loan blend has been used, and on the other, an unadapted loan word has been used:

Dec 76 ndifuna kutenga botolo ya buluu
I want to take the bottle of blue
(i.e., the blue bottle)

Jan 77 ndifuna kumwa mkaka from the bottle waChristopher
I want to drink the milk of

Dec 76 Christopher wabvala suti
has put on suit

Feb 77 ndifuna kubvala sleeping suit on
I want to put on

However, that does not explain the remaining 14 utterances recorded in Table 4. A few may be explained by the fact that Tina did not, at that time, know the equivalent words in the other language, or that not knowing one of the words led to switching to the other language for the rest of the sentence, even when she knew all the other words in the original language. The following utterances may be explained in this way:

I ndi a bird

Jun 76 good night, mawa

Jul 76 thawa, go mummy

nice flower kununkhira

Dec 76 go to sleep now, mkatimo

IV ndi sun over world

Mar 77 mafuta pa bottom, and on my leg, and on my knee

A further two of these utterances may be considered to be part of Tina's "practice" sessions, when she carried out monologues usually with either her Dolly or Teddy:

Dec 76 go to sleep now, mkatimo (see also above)

Jan 77 ndinyamule Teddy feel cold

The first occurred in the middle of the following monologue:

> Hello Teddy. I've been to work. Yeah. You been to work? Bye-bye, Teddy, see you tomorrow, Teddy. Don't cry, it doesn't matter, it doesn't hurt. What's the matter? Don't cry Teddy . . . when I wake up. Going to wake up, Teddy. Come on, Teddy. Don't cry. Lelo tikaone Tina, mummy (Today we're going to see Tina) Go to sleep now, mkatimo. Hello, Tina. What's wrong? Wake up, Teddy. This is Tina, Teddy. Let's go and buy . . . What you doing, Tina?

The second occurred as part of the following monologue:

> Dolly, ukugwa? (are you falling?) You want to go in the bag? That's going in here. Ndinyamule Teddy feel cold. Teddy, you feel cold. Oh, yes. That's heavy (carrying the bag) kulemela (it's heavy). You feel cold together. I put my boots on. etc.

December 1976 and January 1977 were months of rapid advance in English for Tina, and these "practice" sessions, self-initiated and self-directed, obviously played an important part in her developing competence, and also in the gradual disappearance of Chichewa.

Another explanation of code-mixing relates to the above "practice" sessions. Three utterances in which Tina code-mixes are actually followed by self-corrections:

Jul 76 nandolo it's hot otentha
pigeon peas hot

Jan 77 no, I'm not wakhuta/Tina sanakhute
you've had has not had enough
enough

Mar 77 ndinalumpha up jumped/I jumped
I jumped

In the first case, the code-mixed utterance was immediately preceeded by the question, "Wakhuta?" asked of her by her mother at the end of a meal, and while she started off code-switching from the previous utterance, it seems she realised her mistake and immediately corrected herself. The second example is more like self-translation, which occurred far more frequently in the early stages, as the following examples show:

Jun 76 cloth nsalu pukute wataya
cloth should wipe you have spilled

Jul 76 mummy, salt, mchele, ndithire
salt I should add

you mwana/iwe mwana
you baby

ona eyes/look eyes

The remaining four utterances are inexplicable by any count. Two are similar:

Dec 76 osaopen it

Jan 77 osasay thank you
don't

It is not that Tina didn't know the negative imperative don't, she used it frequently to warn her younger brother. Nor was morphological borrowing of this kind frequent in her speech, unlike the examples Burling gives of his child's Garo (Burling, 1959). There are in fact only two other examples:

Jul 76 zithree
plural morpheme

Dec 76 mummy, how li you?
are

However, both of these examples have explanations. In the first case, while Chichewa has the word for three, it also frequently borrows the English word, adapted to filii. The second case may simply have been a temporary mispronunciation of are, especially as the r/l distinction is not made in Chichewa and Tina had problems with r in English (for example, the American influence has led her to pronounce door not with a final r but with a final l).

That leaves us with the following:

II ndagona this way
I'm sleeping

Jan 77 wagunda white door
she bumped into

In both cases, Tina knew the words in both languages. In the latter case, Tina actually used the word for door in the immediately preceeding utterance:

wagunda mutu chitseko/wagunda white door
she bumped head door

So why didn't this trigger off white door in Chichewa?

In spite of this failure to find an explanation for the code-mixing in some of the sentences, one can abstract some patterns and implicit awareness of constituent structure. One thing I noticed in these examples is that the English noun phrases in Chichewa sentences preserve the English word order, which is the reverse of Chichewa word order: adj/poss + noun, as opposed to noun + adj/poss, and interestingly, there is little mixing of the languages between the adjective and the noun. The rare examples of morphological mixing on the verb also seems to indicate awareness of the verb phrase as a constituent.

It is obvious that the nature of the interaction between English and Chichewa as languages in the wider community has influenced Tina's language development to the extent that her code-mixing follows the pattern of borrowing from English into Chichewa. It is also noticeable that Tina code-mixed much less in English-base sentences than in Chichewa-base sentences, probably for the same reason. She seems to have abstracted the information that it is acceptable to code-mix in Chichewa-base sentences, but not in English-base sentences. In addition, she was very early aware that while most Chichewa-speakers she came into contact with were bilingual, the English-speakers were not. Consequently, the opportunities for code-mixing in English were greatly reduced. Further studies of code-mixing in the process of simultaneous language acquisition should through greater light on how children process the wealth of linguistic input they receive and have to make sense of such that code-mixing does not lead to putting an adjective in the place where an adverb is appropriate, etc. Such research is relevant not only to the study of bilingualism but of first language acquisition too.

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